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Saving Graces

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Saving Graces

After a parent's death, students often face unexpected financial burdens. That's when IWU's Parent Fund steps up to help provide the aid they need to finish their educations.

Story by **NANCY STEELE BROKAW '71**



"I wished I could pause on that graduation stage and turn to everyone and just say thank you." — Beth Janick '06 (shown above)

As she talks, Beth Janick '06 fiddles with a charm bracelet that holds only one charm — a picture of her dad, Tom Janick. "I always wear this when I know I'm going to talk about my dad," Janick explains. "I like to have him near."

"My father worked so hard his whole life to provide my sister Katie ('03) and me with the best education," Janick says. "Despite being diagnosed with lymphoma (a form of cancer), he continued working long hours in order to support our family."

Undeterred by his illness, Beth's dad managed to come down for her sister's graduation in May 2003 but a stem-cell transplant in August of that year forced him to stop working.

"Dad took a leave of absence from work, then another. He came down for a Kappa Delta Dad's Day but I don't know how he made it," Janick says. "His immune system was shot."

"My mom worried all the time," Janick recalls.

Heart problems meant another long hospitalization for Janick's dad in the summer after her freshman year. On July 19, 2004, between Janick's sophomore and junior years, he died.

"There were so many bills, so much to deal with, it was just all overwhelming," Janick says.

The phone rang right after the family returned home from the cemetery. "It was someone from IWU, from Financial Aid," Janick recalls. "We were told not to worry, that my expenses would be covered, thanks to the Parent Fund."

“To have that weight lifted off my mom’s shoulders, it was so great,” Janick says, wiping tears from her eyes.

Madeline Janick, Beth’s mom, tears up, too, when she talks about that call. “I can’t even tell you how much it meant to me. It was saving to us when we got that phone call right then.”

Plenty of hard times followed. The family home in Crete, Ill., which Madeline and Tom had built together, had to be sold. Madeline had to look for a full-time job.

“I tell people about the Parent Fund and what it’s done for us and they are so amazed,” Madeline says. “No one has heard of another school that does that.”

“To be honest,” she continues, “Tom and I had given what we could to the Parent Fund, which wasn’t much with two kids in school, but we didn’t even know what it did.”

From the day of that saving phone call, Beth Janick was determined to give back. Just four months after her father died, Janick stood in front of 85 parents during the annual Family Weekend and told her story. She did it again the next year.

Jennifer Krause is an associate director of Development at Illinois Wesleyan. Her responsibilities include serving as a liaison with the Parent Fund and the Parent Board, which works with the fund. “I knew it was hard for Beth to give that speech but it was the best way to explain why this fund is so important,” Krause says. “There was hardly a dry eye. I thought to myself, ‘What a brave young woman.’”

And a determined one.

Janick resolved to not only graduate, but to do so summa cum laude.

She did, last May, with a major in psychology and a business minor. “I wished I could pause on that graduation stage and turn to everyone and just say thank you,” Janick says. In August, she began her training as a market brand representative for Whirlpool Corporation.

“I’ve set goals for myself. I know I’m going to be well off someday — and I’m going to give back to Illinois Wesleyan,” she declares.

“So many people have believed in me. I found a lot of support here with my friends, with the professors, and from the campus at large. That extra support helps you get through it,” Janick concludes. “Even though I’m kind of cosmopolitan, this was the right place for me.”

Her mom agrees. “Illinois Wesleyan is such a special place. I don’t think there are many places like it in the world.”

Krause says that what happened to Janick “happens more than people think it does.

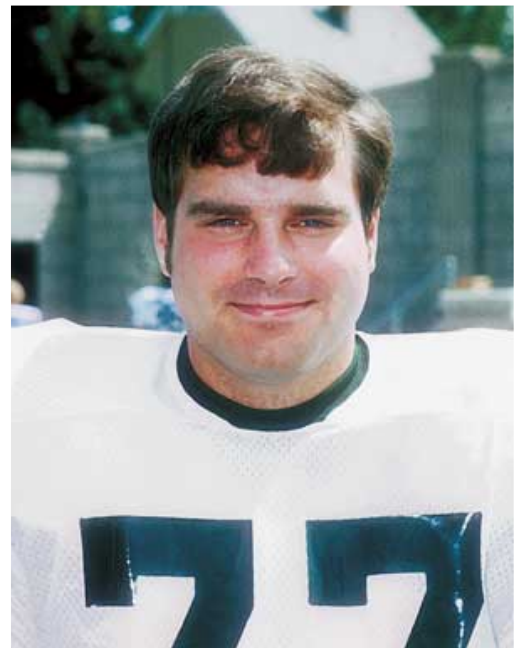
“It varies every year but unfortunately we usually have between two and four students who need assistance from the fund and we have had as many as six in one year,” Krause explains.

The Parent Fund began at an Illinois Wesleyan football game on November 11, 1960. Charles W. Merritt — who was father of one of the Titan players in the game, Charles C. Merritt '62 — learned that the father of another player had died suddenly not long before. The elder Merritt passed a paper bag around the stadium to collect money to help the family with college costs. The Parent Fund was born. The fund is designed to extend a helping hand when a family suffers the death or permanent disability of the breadwinning parent. Through the years, the Parent Fund has supported over 300 young people.

“The idea is so simple — it’s families helping families,” says Terry Irwin, who has served on the Parent Board along with her husband Mark. The Irwins have had three children graduate from IWU: Lindsey '06, William '04, and Sara Irwin Dodd '02.

“My husband and I felt strongly that giving to the Parent Fund was the right thing to do,” Irwin says. “Our children were so happy taking their three different paths through IWU.

“Illinois Wesleyan is a kid’s second home,” Irwin continues. “When a child loses a parent, their first home is interrupted, but to have their second home interrupted, too — it’s just not fair. I mean, life often isn’t fair but we can even it up a little through this fund.”



“I called (football coach) Don Larson. I told him, ‘I don’t think I’ll be coming to school. I don’t have any money. In fact, I don’t have anything.’ He said to just hang on.” — Wes Schneider '75

Wes Schneider '75 ponders the impact of having his life "evened up a little." It happened 30 years ago. *(shown above)*

"I was from a small, blue-collar town southwest of Chicago," says Schneider. "I worked many jobs as a kid. I delivered newspapers, worked construction, laid sod, and worked at a vegetable stand. All my money went to my mom, who was divorced and the sole breadwinner for me.

"I had several thousand dollars saved, which was a lot of money back then," Schneider recalls.

A week before Schneider was set to show up for IWU football practice, in August 1971, his mother was killed in an automobile accident. All the money he'd saved was tied up in probate because she died without a will.

"I called (football coach) Don Larson," Schneider recalls. "I told him, 'I don't think I'll be coming to school. I don't have any money. In fact, I don't have anything.' He said to just hang on."

When Schneider arrived on campus a week later, "I had five dollars in my pocket," he remembers. "My aunts said, 'See you back next week.' I had two younger siblings at home; we didn't know if we'd be made wards of the state or not."

The Financial Aid office assured Schneider that he would be able to attend Illinois Wesleyan.

"It was a watershed moment, really," Schneider says. "It was no free ticket; I worked a lot of jobs and took out loans but IWU made it possible."

Campus meals weren't offered on Sundays in those days and Schneider recalls eating a lot of Sunday dinners with former Director of Publicity Ed Alsene and his family, as well as the Don Larson family.

Schneider was named a second-team Academic All-American in football and graduated magna cum laude.

Schneider now lives with his family in Kenilworth, Ill., and owns Creative Marketing Communications, a nationally recognized sales promotion agency that has had GM, Bayer, and Nestle among its clients.

"If folks hadn't stepped up, my life would have been vastly different," Schneider says. "In my experience, the IWU family closes rank around their own."

Stephanie Jaeckel '06 knows all about that feeling. In October of her freshman year at IWU, her father was diagnosed with terminal liver cancer. "My family decided to fight the disease with everything we could, in hopes that my brother, who was then 5, might have a chance to get to know his father.

“I worked extra hard that year and the next, so that I was ready to give a solo piano recital my sophomore year. This is something that music majors usually do not give until their senior year, but it meant so much to me that my father was able to hear me play,” Jaeckel says.

In 2004, the summer after her sophomore year, “we lost my sister to the tragedy of youth suicide,” Jaeckel says. “My father did not live for much longer,” dying on Dec. 30, 2004.

“My mom was really struggling with two deaths, keeping the household together, and trying to pay all those bills. It was a very, very difficult time.”

Through support from the Parent Fund and by teaching piano, Jaeckel was able to return to school for spring semester, one week after her father’s funeral. “Not only was the Parent Fund supportive, but everyone on campus — students, faculty, the business office, *everyone* — was just such a wonderful support group.

“I’m so grateful to the parents who have given to the fund; I wrote them thank-you notes all throughout the year.”



“I feel so blessed to be a member of the IWU community. It’s one of the few universities I’ve heard about that truly cares about its students through all their life situations.”

— Stephanie Jaeckel '06 (shown above)

Jaeckel has begun a master’s degree program in liturgical theology at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, Ill. She started a piano studio to help meet expenses and is helping to take care of her brother, now 9.

“I feel so blessed to be a member of the IWU community,” she concludes. “It’s one of the few universities I’ve heard about that truly cares about its students through all their life situations.”

Caring is one thing. Writing a check is another. Most parents who have kids in college aren’t looking for more check-writing suggestions. Nonetheless, Krause says around 35 percent of current parents write checks to the IWU Parent Fund. Some alumni specifically support the fund, too.

Donna and Steve Klingel, parents of Daniel ’07, a business administration major, have their own reasons for giving to the fund. “We always had a goal of saving enough to send our children to private schools if that was the education they desired,” says Donna.

“And we did save the money,” she continues.

“We were financially successful.”

Daniel was successful, too. Through his hard academic work, he was able to earn a merit scholarship to IWU and then maintain it by keeping his grades high.

“That scholarship adds up to about a free year of school,” Donna says. “And it just didn’t feel right to take that money back or use it to buy him a car. That didn’t seem to honor his achievement.”

So, after conferring with Daniel, they decided to give all the scholarship money back to the Parent Fund. “This is Daniel’s legacy,” Donna says.

Donna speculates she and her husband will continue to give to the fund even after Daniel graduates. The stories of the recipients touch her deeply.

David Zohfeld ’04 is one of those stories. He grew up as the only child of a single parent on the South Side of Chicago. It wasn’t easy. Being accepted to Illinois Wesleyan University was the proudest moment of his mother Patricia’s life. “By going to a great school, I made all her hard work — which included working three jobs — worth it,” Zohfeld says.

Patricia Zohfeld died at age 42 of a sudden brain aneurysm in October of her son’s first year of college. “My entire world crumbled,” David recalls. “It wasn’t until after the funeral that I realized I had no money and no idea what was to become of my life.”

The Parent Fund stepped in and Zohfeld went on to be a standout student. He earned the Outstanding Marketing Student Award from the American Marketing Association, Central Illinois Chapter, during his senior year. Zohfeld has recently resettled in the Chicago area after serving in the Peace Corps.

“I owe my entire future to the Illinois Wesleyan Parent Fund,” Zohfeld says.

Zohfeld knows what Wes Schneider learned 30 years ago — when times get tough, the IWU family closes rank around their own.

Editor’s note: To learn more about the IWU Parent Fund, contact Jennifer Krause at jkrause2@iwu.edu or by phone at (309) 556-3963. To make a contribution, [click here](#) or call (800) 689-9743.